


TO: GENERAL COMMITTEE


SUBJECT: PET LICENSING SERVICE REVIEW

WARD: ALL

PREPARED BY AND KEY CONTACT: G. ALLISON, P. ENG., DIRECTOR BUILDING & BY-LAW SERVICES #4323 

SUBMITTED BY: G. ALLISON, P. ENG., DIRECTOR BUILDING & BY-LAW SERVICES

GENERAL MANAGER APPROVAL: PATRICIA ELLIOTT-SPENCER, MBA, CPA, CMA, GENERAL MANAGER OF COMMUNITY AND CORPORATE SERVICES 

CHIEF ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER APPROVAL: C. LADD, CHIEF ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER 

RECOMMENDED MOTION

1. That the Pet Licensing Program be replaced with a Pet Registration Program that incorporates the following features;
 - a) All domestic dogs shall be registered with the City of Barrie by submission of a complete application that provides information about the dog and the dog owner's contact information, proof the dog has been immunized against the rabies virus, and payment of the required registration fee;
 - b) All domestic cats, at the option of their owners, can be registered with the City of Barrie by submission of a complete application that provides information about the cat and the cat owner's contact information, proof the cat has been immunized against the rabies virus, and payment of the required registration fee;
 - c) All dogs and cats registered with the City of Barrie shall be assigned a Barrie pet registration tag bearing a unique identification number, which shall be worn by the pet whenever the pet is not on the owner's property; and
 - d) Any dog or cat found running at large and wearing the assigned pet registration tag shall be returned to the pet owner free of any charges unless the animal is impounded when attempts to contact with the owner are unsuccessful.
2. That the Animal Control By-law 2010-035 be amended to implement the new Pet Registration Program and to rescind the Pet Licensing Program as outlined in staff report BBS003-15.
3. That the Fees By-law 2015-025 be amended to replace the Pet Licensing Fees with Pet Registration Fees as follows;
 - a) Registration Fee, each dog or cat \$50.00 each
 - b) Registration Fee for Previously Licensed Pets \$25.00 each
 - c) Change of Contact Information, per Owner \$10.00

PURPOSE & BACKGROUND

Council Motion 15-A-031

4. On March 9, 2015 Council Motion 15-A-031 approved Motion 15-G-049 from General Committee which asked, in paragraph 22 “that staff in the Building and By-law Services Department undertake a review of the cost and revenues associated with pet licensing as well as opportunities to enhance the level of pet owner compliance with licensing requirements and streamlining the licensing process, and report back to General Committee.”
5. Many residents of Barrie have a dog or a cat as a pet. Whether the pet is a companion or is a defender and protector, they are a part of many households.
6. Within an urban community such as Barrie, there is an interest in ensuring the welfare of these animals, and the safety and wellbeing of the community are protected from any perceived harm.
7. There are several municipal by-laws and provincial regulations that address both animal welfare and community interests with respect to pets. A summary is attached as Appendix “A” with the combined purposes of;
 - a) Protecting the welfare of animals by;
 - i) Requiring humane care and treatment,
 - ii) Requiring dogs and cats to be immunized against rabies,
 - iii) Limiting the number of cats and dogs per household,
 - iv) Promoting the spaying and neutering of pets,
 - v) Sheltering and caring for stray/abandoned pets, and
 - vi) Returning stray pets to their owners where possible.
 - b) Protecting the safety and wellbeing of the community by requiring owners to;
 - i) Keep their pets under control when off of their owner’s property,
 - ii) Immunize their cats and dogs against rabies,
 - iii) Stoop and scoop all of their animal’s excrement from their property, neighbour’s properties and public lands,
 - iv) Control the excessive barking of dogs,
 - v) Not own or keep any dangerous breeds of dogs, and
 - vi) Report all incidents of animal bites to the Health Unit.

Municipal Animal Control Services

8. Except for the Noise By-law and the Rabies Immunization Regulation, the responsibility to administer and enforce the Animal Control regulations in Barrie has been assigned to the By-law Services Branch of the Building and By-law Services Department. The following table summarizes the statistical data regarding the provision of Animal Control services by the By-law Services Branch for 2014.

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|--------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Service Requests | 2,150 requests (average 6 per day, every day) regarding stray dogs, animal bites/attacks, excessive number of dogs/cats in a household, the keeping of prohibited animals and the feeding of wildlife |
| Animals Taken to OSPCA Shelter | 240 animals (average 4-5 per week) of which only 16 (6.7%) were wearing Barrie license tags when impounded, the remainder requiring new license tags when being claimed. |

| | |
|--------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Issuance of Pet Licenses | 4337 dog licenses (1084 new, 3253 renewals) 1209 cat licenses (302 new, 907 renewals) |
| Staff Complement | 1 full time officer, 3 part time officers and 1 full time clerk |
| Service Cost (Estimated) | \$250,000 annual contract with OSPCA for animal shelter \$340,000 department operating costs \$185,000 corporate overhead costs Total \$775,000 annual cost |
| Service Revenues | \$14,000 enforcement fees and fines \$96,000 pet licensing |

9. In addition to responding to requests for service and the administration and enforcement of pet licensing, staff provide public education about responsible animal care and control in the community. Officers also patrol municipal parks and trails watching for any dogs running at large or off-leash.

Existing Municipal Pet Licensing Program

10. The purposes of the municipal pet licensing program are;
- Facilitating the prompt identification of the owner of a stray and/or injured pet, allowing for the immediate contact with the owner;
 - Confirming the number and breed of pets per household comply with the limits of the Animal Control By-law and the Dog Owner's Liability Act;
 - Assuring the community that licensed pets have been immunized against the rabies virus, reducing the risk of infecting other pets and people in the community; and
 - Encouraging the spaying or neutering of pets to help manage and control the pet population.
11. Our existing municipal pet licensing program applies to cats and dogs. The mandatory program seeks, on an annual basis, the following;
- Information about each cat and dog kept as a pet noting its breed, age, gender and whether the pet has been altered (i.e. spayed or neutered),
 - Information about the pet owner's name and contact information,
 - Confirmation each pet has up-to-date immunizations against rabies as required by Ontario Regulation 567 of the Ontario Health Protection and Promotion Act, and
 - The payment of the required annual licensing fee.
12. Annual renewal notices are mailed to every registered pet owner in the fall. Owners can renew on-line, by mail or can attend the By-law Services office at 45 Cedar Pointe Drive to submit the required information and pay the applicable fee. Once completed, staff mail out or provide the owner with the new year's license tag which must be worn by the pet whenever it is off of the owner's property.
13. Licensing Fees are charged annually as per Council's Fees By-law with 2015 rates of;
- \$41.00 for new licenses for unaltered dogs and cats, and the renewal license for an unaltered cat;
 - \$36.00 for the renewal license for an unaltered dog;
 - \$31.00 for a new license for an altered dog;
 - \$26.00 for a renewal license for an altered dog; and

- \$16.00 for a new or renewal license for an altered cat.
14. Our senior citizen residents are eligible to have the pet licensing fees waived for any dog license and for any altered cat license.
 15. After July 1st, new pet licenses for the current year can be purchased for 50% of the posted rate when the owner purchases the next year's license at the same time.
 16. Based on the fees collected in 2014 combined with the discounts offered to seniors, the average license fee collected in 2014 was \$18. Based on approved fee increases for 2015, the average fee per license will be \$26 before the senior's discount, and \$22 each when the free licenses to seniors is including.
 17. The following enforcement service fees have been established to encourage compliance with the licensing requirements;
 - \$60 Animal Control Service Fees for dog catching and for confirmed contraventions of the Animal Control By-law
 - \$50 Impound Fee plus \$10/day Pet Care Fee for animals impounded at the Animal Shelter
 18. Of the \$775,000 total cost for Animal Control services, approximately \$78,750 or 15% of the staffing costs for Animal Control are attributed to the administration and enforcement of the pet licensing program. As noted earlier, license fees of approximately \$96,000 are applied to fully cover the annual costs of the pet licensing program and to help offset the other Animal Control service costs.

Estimated Participation Rate

19. There is no census data available for the number of cats and dogs being kept as pets in the City of Barrie.
20. Based on information from a 2012 Canada Pet Wellness Survey, 35% of Canadian households have at least one dog and 38% of Canadian households have at least 1 cat. A conservative estimate would therefore suggest a pet population of 18,618 dogs and 20,214 cats reside in Barrie households. Assuming many of those households have more than one dog or cat, staff will use 25,000 dogs and 27,000 cats as our best guess of the pet population.
21. In 2014 there were 4,337 dogs and 1,209 cats that were licensed under our mandatory municipal pet licensing program. This represents approximately 17.3% of the dogs and 4.5% of the cats.
22. Most municipalities have a pet licensing program for dogs, and only some require cats to be licensed. In general, the compliance rate of other municipalities is around 11%. Even though the licensing requirements are mandatory, the voluntary participation rate is very low with a portion being forced to obtain a license when adopting a pet from the shelter or when found walking their unlicensed pet in public.

Assumptions Regarding Non-Participation

23. Our enforcement staff indicates the following reasons given by owners found to have an unlicensed dog or cat;

- The cost of obtaining a license at any amount is being avoided,
- There are no real consequence for non-compliance except for a warning to obtain the required license, so every year of not being discovered is a cost saving,
- There is limited benefit for the cost: they assume their pet will never be running at large, or their pet already has an identification tag to help return their lost pet,
- Already licensed in another municipality and having just moved here, they thought their pet license from their former municipality was still valid,
- Unaware of the requirement to obtain a license for cats, which is not normally required elsewhere, and
- Can't be bothered.

ANALYSIS

24. Council asked staff to “undertake a review of the cost and revenues associated with pet licensing as well as opportunities to enhance the level of pet owner compliance with licensing requirements and streamlining the licensing process, and report back to General Committee.”
25. The statistical information of costs, revenues and compliance rates for the mandatory pet licensing program for cats and dogs are noted above. Before exploring the opportunities to enhance the level of pet owner compliance and streamlining the licensing process, consideration should be given to the founding principles of the pet licensing program to confirm the principles are still a valid concern for the community. Those founding principles include;
 - Facilitating the prompt identification of the owner of a stray and/or injured pet, allowing for the immediate contact with the owner,
 - Confirming the number of pets per household comply with the limits of the Animal Control By-law,
 - Assuring the community that licensed pets have been immunized against the rabies virus, reducing the risk of infecting other pets and people in the community, and
 - Encouraging the spaying or neutering of pets to help manage and control the pet population.

Identifying the Owner of a Stray Pet

26. Whereas 83% of dog owners and 95% of cat owners are not obtaining licenses for their pets, we can only assume they are not concerned about finding their pet if it becomes stray, or they have taken other steps to identify the pet's owner. Examples include embedded ID chips inserted by a veterinarian, or personalized ID tags that provide a phone number to call if found astray.
27. Staff's experience in handling stray pets includes many circumstances where the stray pet can be returned promptly to the owner because the owner is out searching for the pet, they had already notified the enforcement office their pet was loose, or neighbours recognize the pet and identify its home.
28. Even without identifying tags, many stray dogs are eventually claimed by their owners from the shelter. The percentage of claimed stray cats is not very high. In some cases, the owner can be identified if the animal has an embedded chip ID and the owner's contact information has been kept updated. All unclaimed pets are offered for adoption.
29. From the low number of pets that actually are taken to the shelter (240 animals = 0.5% of the estimated pet population of cats and dogs), and the low number of participants in the program, one could question whether the principle of requiring mandatory pet tags to help identify the

owners of stray pets to assist with the pet's return is truly valid. If the beneficiaries really don't care about a municipal pet ID program, then why should the rest of the community?

Restricting the Number of Dogs and Cats per Household

30. To see if households in Barrie are generally limiting the number of pets to the maximum of 3 dogs and 6 cats that are over the age of six months, staff considered the number of complaints where an excessive number of pets were located.
31. In 2014 36 complaints were received alleging that someone owned or harboured more than the permitted number of animals. In the context of over 39,000 households that may have at least one pet, this is a very small percentage of potential violators.

Immunization of Cats and Dogs Against Rabies

32. Rabies is a viral disease that causes acute inflammation of the brain in humans and other warm-blooded animals.
33. Regulation 567 under the Health Protection and Promotion Act requires that all dogs and cats be immunized regularly (every one to three years depending on the vaccine administered) to protect the pet from being infected, and from transmitting the virus through bites to humans. Veterinarians are diligent in requiring the pets they handle having up-to-date immunizations. All dog bites and cat bites involving humans must be reported to the local Medical Officer of Health who then seeks verification the offending animal does not contain the rabies virus.
34. In 2014 there were 35 reports in Barrie of animal bites or attacks where staff investigated the immunization records of the animals. Even if the animal was licensed, staff would still ask to see the current records for the animal.
35. According to an Inspector from the Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit, there were 734 domestic animals quarantined in 2014 by the Unit as a result of a reported animal bite. This included;
 - a) 350 dogs of which 280 (80%) were found to have proof of current vaccinations,
 - b) 120 cats of which 74 (62%) were found to have current vaccinations, and
 - c) 264 animals of unrecorded species were deemed to have current vaccinations based on the owner's declaration.
36. There is no mandatory obligation for the municipality to monitor or investigate whether the owners of dogs and cats are immunizing their pets against the rabies virus. That responsibility lies with the Medical Officer of Health.
37. While the incidents of rabies occurring amongst cats and dogs in North America are rare, and it appears most pet owners are getting their pets immunized, the consequences of getting rabies can be fatal if not immunized prior to any symptoms displaying themselves.

Controlling the Pet Population by Neutering and Spaying

38. The spaying and neutering of pets helps to control the pet population by reducing the risk of unwanted pregnancies amongst cats and dogs. Through fee rate discounts, it was intended to reward owners that had their pets spayed or neutered. Approximately 89.5% of dogs and 98.5% of cats being licensed were identified as having been spayed or neutered.

39. There is no evidence to confirm that owners decided to spay or neuter their pet simply because the license fee would be lower. Since the majority of pet owners are not obtaining a license, with little or no financial consequence, it is clear that fee incentives are not required.

In Summary

40. In summary, despite the low participation rate in the municipal pet licensing program;
- a) Only 240 animals (0.5% of the pet population) were taken to the animal shelter in 2014 because the owner could not be readily identified or contacted,
 - b) Most pets are being immunized against rabies,
 - c) Incidents of excessive number of pets per household are rare, and
 - d) The revenues from pet licensing are covering the administrative costs of the program but do not offset the costs of the animal shelter nor other animal control services.

Opportunities to Increase Participation Rates

41. Opportunities to increase participation rates with the Pet Licensing Program include;
- a) Increased enforcement by hiring more officers to do more patrols of parks and trails looking for unlicensed pets and forcing the owners to obtain a license,
 - b) Increased public information campaigns to highlight the benefits of pet immunization and of returning a stray pet if it is wearing a Barrie I.D. tag,
 - c) Providing a free leash with every first time license,
 - d) Reducing the fee for licensing,
 - e) Improving the on-line application process,
 - f) Providing for the pre-payment of multi-year renewals,
 - g) Providing cost-recovery incentives through local retail discounts for the owners of licensed pets,
 - h) Converting to a simplified pet registration program with a one-time registration fee.

Opportunities to Implement Process Improvements

42. Opportunities to implement process improvements for the Pet Licensing Program include;
- a) Reducing the volume of tags issued annually by issuing multi-year tags, or by issuing just one tag for the life of the pet,
 - b) Increasing the compliance rate for renewals by implementing a late fee penalty,
 - c) Discontinuing the requirement for proof of rabies immunization for renewals, and
 - d) Implement a single fee for all licenses and discontinue the fee structure based on species, spaying/neutering and owner's age.

Staff Recommendations

43. After considering the issues regarding the keeping of dogs and cats as pets, and the impacts on the community, it would be very expensive to increase the participation rate to the point where it is having any meaningful positive impact for the community. Staff believe the community would be best served by campaigns encouraging pet owners to have their pets immunized against

- rabies, and to offer a registration program that offers a free first-time return of a stray pet that is wearing a Barrie I.D. tag.
44. Since the participation rate in a Pet Licensing Program is at the discretion of the pet owner, the costs and inconvenience of participation must be seen as having a direct benefit to the owner. If they are already having their pets immunized and are reasonably sure they will be able to find their pet if it should go astray, they might not see any benefit to paying for an annual licensing fee for their pets.
 45. Some municipalities have engaged a program that offers price reductions at local retail stores when they show a special-issued card indicating their pets are licensed with the municipality. While the results have helped to increase participation rates, the contracted service charges \$10 per year per pet license to manage the program including the maintenance of participating retail stores. If Council wishes to continue with annual license renewal requirements, this option could be explored further.
 46. From an administration perspective, the most expensive part of the Pet Licensing Program is the mailing of renewal notices, the mailing of new tags and the chasing after those owners who do not renew the licenses in a timely manner. By reducing or eliminating the renewal process or encouraging prompt renewals through late fees, staff can reduce the costs. The recommendation is to eliminate renewals.
 47. While on-line registrations and renewals can continue to be an option available for pet owners, staff are currently in transition of significant software platforms. The existing pet licensing system is a simple program with limited features, scheduled to be replaced in 2017. It would not be efficient to invest resources to modify the existing system now when it will soon be replaced.
 48. If adopted, staff will still require pet owners to confirm their pets have been immunized against rabies when registering their pets, but there will be no annual or bi-annual reminders to re-immunize the pets. Instead staff can remind all pet owners on a regular basis to protect their pets and their family members against rabies by regular visits to their vets.
 49. The proposed pet registration program would require dog owners to obtain a one-time pet registration tag. The application would require proof of immunization of the dog against rabies. The proposed fee for applications processed for 2016 is \$50 per pet.
 50. For pets already licensed with the City of Barrie, the fee for converting to a one-time pet registration would be \$25 to be similar to the current dog renewal license fee. Notifications would be sent by mail to the current licensed pet owners.

ALTERNATIVES

51. The following alternatives are available for consideration by General Committee:

Alternative #1 General Committee could maintain the existing Pet Licensing Program. (i.e. Status Quo)

This alternative is not recommended as it has proven to be ineffective in achieving the intended purposes unless there are changes to encourage and/or enforce compliance.

Alternative #2 General Committee could alter the proposed recommendation by eliminating the Pet Licensing Program.

Although this alternative is available, it would result in a loss of revenues of approximately \$100,000 per year without any significant reduction of staffing costs.

Alternative #3 General Committee could alter the proposed recommendation by maintaining the Pet Licensing Program and incorporating any of the suggested options to increase the participation rate.

This alternative is not recommended unless referred back to staff for further analysis.

FINANCIAL

52. The costs associated with a registration program would be initially similar to the current licensing program. The revenues based on the proposed fee rates would be 4,000 dogs transferred from the licensing program @ \$25 each, plus 1,000 new dogs registered @ \$50 each for a total revenue of \$150,000, compared to the forecasted 2015 license revenues of \$100,000.

53. In subsequent years with adequate promotion, we might expect 2,000 new pet registrations per year @\$50 each for an annual revenue of \$100,000.

54. No additional staff resources will be required to implement the recommendation.

LINKAGE TO 2014-2018 STRATEGIC PLAN

55. The recommendation(s) included in this Staff Report support the following goals identified in the 2014-2018 Strategic Plan:

Responsible Spending

56. Responsible spending includes the provision of services that have meaningful benefit to the community, delivered in a cost-efficient manner where the beneficiaries of the services bear the cost of the service. A simplified pet registration program that includes a one-time registration process and a check that the registered pet has been immunized is believed to be a reasonable service to the community at reasonable cost.

APPENDIX "A"

Summary of Various By-laws and Regulations Concerning Animal Controls in Barrie

By-law 2010-035 Animal Control By-law

- Prohibits the keeping of specified animals as pets including exotic animals and livestock
- Limits the number of pets per household by type of pet
- Requires cats and dogs to be on a leash when off the owner's property
- Requires owners to pick up and dispose of pet excrement from public property and from neighbour's property
- Requires the owners to license their cats and dogs
- Prohibits the intentional and unintentional feeding of wildlife

By-law 2011-107 Yard Maintenance By-law

- Requires property owners to maintain their properties clean of dog excrement

By-law 2006-140 Noise By-law

- Requires owners to control the nuisance of barking dogs

Ontario Regulation 567, Rabies Immunization, under the Health Protection and Promotion Act

- Requires all cats and dogs to be immunized against rabies

Dog Owners' Liability Act

- Prohibits the keeping or harbouring of specified dog breeds
- Provides controls and monetary penalties related to dog attacks including bites

Protection of Livestock and Poultry from Dogs Act

- Requires owners to keep their dogs from harassing or harming livestock or poultry on neighbouring properties
- Provides financial compensation from the municipality to owners of livestock or poultry when the livestock or poultry are injured or killed by a dog or dogs not residing on the property